

(Re)Thinking Music & Revolution

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Consider destroying (or purposefully forgetting) your headphones.

Whether you live in a city or rural area, the daily use of headphones physically and aurally blocks your connection to the surrounding sonic environment. Listening as a way of knowing is lost to listening as a way of consuming.

An SFGate news story, "Absorbed Device Users Oblivious to Danger," recounts a 2013 incident on a San Francisco light rail train that illustrates one of the many dangerous consequences of alienation created by industrial, technological society.

The article describes the random killing of a San Francisco State University student by a lone gunman. The gunman pulled a gun out numerous times while casually walking around the crowded car without notice by passengers on the train. The other riders, shown in a surveillance video, remain affixed to their personal electronic devices, and most are wearing earbuds completely unaware of the man with a gun.

Secluded and enwrapped in our electronics, personal listening devices alienate us from the world. No one on the train communicated the dangers to one another because all were too busy with their aural and visual utopias on the way to their next train stop.

The diverse sounds of our environment and connection with other human beings is standardized and quantified into mono aural affixation that helps us cope with getting from point A to point B without being bothered. We learn to love our alienation.

Experimenting with leaving your headphones behind creates numerous possibilities of connecting sounds in the environment to our sensual bodies like different animal species, a transformer blowing up, wind gusts. Diversity of sounds offer points of contact that you may not be used to or create reaction challenges.

This is OK. Explore the way these sounds contact you and your reactions to them.

For example, a conversation that might not have happened, had you stayed in your headphone cocoon, could generate new knowledge for that day and introduce a human condition that may not have happened. The different sounds in your environment can cause you to interact and generate new thoughts.

The possibilities are endless and you will feel more connected to your environment. You are now actively listening instead of passively hearing.

The word music derives from the Greek *mousike*, which means the art of the muses. The Greek definition describes a creative art of composing or inspiration from the gods channeled through humanly organized sounds. Channeling inspiration from the muses for creative purposes is through human action and is human-centric.

The basic definition of music in our society is any human organized sound. In other societies, music is not a separate category from other forms of human communication or expression. For example, many indigenous groups practice music within ceremony and dance.

The label, music, is not just human-centric, but is Western European-centric. Not every culture has a word for our understanding of music. A continuity exists from constructed notions of Ancient Greek culture, such as the idealization of democracy, which permeate our current epoch and political organization. From ancient Greece to

the Renaissance to modernity, there exists the idea that all great things come from ancient Greek culture in a linear divine coronation, music being one of them.

Currently, as with many of Western society's ideas of human civilization, our modern notion of music (starting in the 17th century) derives from modernity's attempt at creating rational and scientific idealizations of society. The rationalizing of sound comes from Enlightenment thought reflecting the larger Enlightenment idea of humans dominating the natural material world. Western European thought applied to music, created a musical system reflecting civilization's idealized notion of organizing wild sounds.

The construction of instruments, such as the keyboard (harpsichord), served as tools of measurement for expressing a rational approach to music, such as in the contrapuntal Baroque style of concert music. New instruments expressed notions of mathematical precision of sound and led to the construction of an ideal of music that has dominated the rest of the globe today through electronic technology and globalization.

The musical system created along with other forms of technology for dominating the wildness of the world is tonal music, or tonality. Tonal music favors using scales to build pitch relationships. A musical scale is a collection, or measurement, of pitches that express an idealization of numbers naturally found in the universe by mathematically dividing pitches on a monochord or string.

The creation of tonality derived from the Enlightenment's fascination with pitch relationship, leading to codifying the Euro-Western pitch relationships as if they were naturally discovered, already existing, in the environment. The naturalization of this musical system now dominates the rest of the globe and continues to acculturate mass society with a mono-musical system fueled by industrial technologies.

Tonal music dominates Euro-Western culture from modernity forward, and because of globalization, electronic technology, and colonization, the global impact has been the creation of a homogenous listening culture. We lack the patience and pleasure to listen to the environment around us and engage with interspecies or object relationships that create wild sounds.

We learn that music is for the specialists and professionals, but forget that we are active participants of humanly organized sounds in our local environments. The birds "sing," the rooster "crows," the wind "whispers," and the oceans "roar"—if we listen.

Engaging with sounds in their ability to affect our sensorium helps reconnect our body and mind. Engaging with wild sounds actively works against electronic technology's musical culture that separates mind from sensual body.

Tonal music, now ubiquitous with modern electronic devices, is a component of the technological system that has domesticated and alienated humans.

This essay begins a discourse on solutions to industrial music technology. Explore new sounds. Experimenting with new aural environments will create active participants and generate new ways of thinking about the world.

It will spark our creative side and help contribute to our awareness and destruction of the way that music intersects with our present society.

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